

Ageing Population and the Generation Economy of Japan: A Lesson for Bangladesh

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Abstract: The ongoing and mostly permanent transition to an older demographic is a significant global challenge, becoming acute in the next decades. The world has experienced an ageing population and its related consequences in socio-economic development. Although the ageing issue in developing countries is still not as serious as in developed nations, it has become an urgent issue for achieving their agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs), adopted by all United Nations members in 2015. The Global South can draw valuable lessons from developed nations in addressing the challenges of an ageing population, transforming what is often perceived as a burden into a significant resource for economic and social development. This study examines whether Bangladesh can adopt the Japanese model to improve active ageing in the country. This study is expected to significantly improve the policy and strategies of Bangladesh's ageing population, which may help the country achieve its SDGs. This study suggests that Bangladesh's government could consider implementing Japan's long-term care insurance program for the elderly. Additionally, recognizing the country's financial constraints, the government has launched an employment program for the elderly similar to Japan's approach. This initiative is expected to have a positive effect on the country's economy.

Keywords: Ageing population; generation economy; SDGs; Japan; Bangladesh.

Introduction

An ageing population has become an urgent global phenomenon, with long-term societal implications" (Loo et al., 2017, p. 8). The ongoing and mostly permanent transition to an older demographic is a significant global challenge, becoming acute in the next decades. The United Nations Population Division estimates that the current number of people aged 65 and above, which stands at approximately 857 million, could nearly double within the next 25 years, potentially reaching about 1.58 billion by 2050 (Richter, 2025). The world has experienced an ageing population and its related consequences in socio-economic development. Importantly, the developed economies have been significantly influenced by the ageing issue than developing economies. Most of the developed countries have suffered from ageing issues in terms of their impact on the national economy, as the ageing community has created a burden in the social welfare spending without making contributions. Including European society, East Asia, and Latin America and many of the countries in the Global South have experienced an increasing ageing population in recent years. Although the ageing issue in developing countries is still not as serious as in developed nations, it has become an urgent issue for achieving their agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs), adopted by all United Nations members in 2015. Most of the developing countries in Africa and South Asia are striving in favourable conditions with

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the working population. However, the ageing population has increased in the last decade, posing challenges both for developed and developing countries. The number of people aged 60 and above worldwide is expected to grow from 1.1 billion in 2023 to 1.4 billion by 2030. This increase is particularly significant and rapid in developing regions (World Health Organization, 2025). Better lifestyle, healthcare, as well as strong social welfare policies have contributed to the population ageing in developed countries. In contrast, developing countries have faced challenges regarding the fulfilment of basic needs of the ageing population. In this regard, addressing ageism has become a significant area of research by academics and policy circles as the issue has profound implications in the development of modern states, in balance with the SDGs.

Regarding Japan, the country has been significantly affected by the ageing population. The Japanese ageing society is viewed as one of the largest societies in the world. Japan has become the world's fastest ageing society (Obi & Iwasaki, 2013). Japan is recognised as a "super-aged" population, with 28.7% of its citizens aged 65 or older, predominantly women. Additionally, 80,000 centenarians (hundred-year-old people) live in Japanese society. By 2036, individuals aged 65 and above will account for one-third of Japan's total population (European Parliament, 2020). This demographic change due to the growing ageing population has impacted Japan's government spending in terms of pension and healthcare. In this background, the concern has been raised in developed countries such as Japan about how the country has maintained its economic growth with the increasing spending toward ageing-related issues. As one of the strong welfare states in the world, Japan has maintained its ageing issue well, which is a good lesson for a developing nation like Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is one of the developing countries in the South Asian region. Importantly, the country is the eighth-largest country in the world in terms of total population (World population prospects, 2019). However, in Bangladesh, the proportion of individuals aged 60 and above has grown from 7.7% in 2015 to 9.5% in 2023 (Afrin et al., 2025). Bangladesh is blessed by a young population which strongly supports the country's working force. Given the increasing ageing population in the country, it is crucial for the Bangladesh government to explore effective strategies to manage this demographic shift, promote active ageing, and contribute to achieving the SDGs. The Global South can draw valuable lessons from developed nations in addressing the challenges of an ageing population, transforming what is often perceived as a burden into a significant resource for economic and social development. In this regard, this study examines whether Bangladesh can adopt the Japanese model to improve active ageing in the country. This study is expected to significantly improve the policy and strategies of Bangladesh's ageing population, which may help the country achieve its SDGs.

This study is structured into four compelling sections. The first section delves into ageing and generational dynamics through the lens of Japanese experiences, providing valuable insights. The second section highlights the pressing issue of the ageing population in Bangladesh, emphasizing its significance. In the third section, I critically examine whether Bangladesh can learn from Japan's strategies and successes concerning the ageing issue. Finally, the last section summarizes the findings and presents actionable policy recommendations to guide Bangladesh toward a more sustainable future.

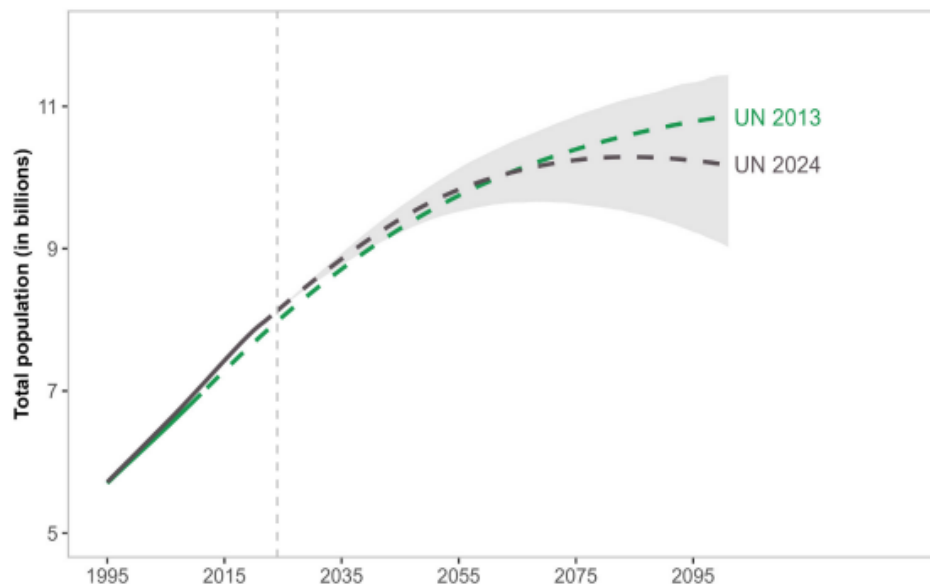
Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the potential for Bangladesh to adopt the Japanese model for enhancing active ageing in the country. This study exclusively employs document analysis to investigate the challenges associated with ageing population management. It examines how Japan, as a developed nation, and Bangladesh, as a developing nation, address the issues related to their ageing populations, and it seeks to identify lessons that can enhance the management of ageing populations more broadly. I analyze a variety of secondary documents, including policy papers, government reports, and publications from international research and consulting organizations. Furthermore, the study incorporates relevant books, academic articles, and newspaper reports to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Contextualizing the Ageing Population: Global Trends and Concerns

It is generally recognized that the increase in life expectancy at birth in low-mortality countries (White, 2002) is largely due to lower mortality rates among older individuals and improvements in the modern health care systems (Vaupel et al., 1998). In the 1980s, we witnessed a remarkable decline in mortality rates among older individuals, primarily driven by significant advancements in medical care. This pivotal shift highlights the profound impact of healthcare improvements on longevity. In 1984, the World Health Organization (WHO) introduced a transformative model of health transitions that fundamentally reshaped our understanding of global health progress (Michel & Robine, 2004). As a result, the world's population is expected to rise considerably over the next 50 to 60 years, with projections indicating it could reach around 10.3 billion by the mid-2080s, up from an estimated 8.2 billion in 2024 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Global population Prospects (1995–2100)



Source: World Population Prospects 2024.

As the elderly population grows, modern society must prioritize sustainable socio-economic development that ensures our seniors a high quality of life. Investing in their well-being can foster a more inclusive and thriving community for all generations. Thus, it is pertinent to mention the following:

Population ageing is a major demographic trend of our time. The increase in the proportion and number of elderly people requires that the governments of “ageing” countries develop measures to mitigate the effects of demographic ageing reflected in two interrelated aspects: maintaining sustainable socio-economic development and ensuring a decent quality of life for the elderly. (Dobrokhleb & Barsukov, 2017, p. 89).

As the global population ages, various challenges have become increasingly prominent. Alongside the rising expenditures governments face, significant risks include the proliferation of epidemiological diseases, the potential for financial crises, and a growing scarcity of qualified caregivers for the elderly (Khan, 2019). Thus, “an emerging and promising strategy for sustainable aging societies is to view older adults as assets that benefit society with their longer healthy life expectancy and rich human capital” (Ko & Yeung, 2019, p. 1). The difficulties stemming from social isolation, age discrimination, and shifts in family support for older adults can significantly affect a nation’s progress (Kreager, 2006; Yeung & Cheung, 2015). In light of this background, this study examines the situation of the ageing population in Japan and its policy implications for the connection with Bangladesh's ageing demographic. The following section will discuss Japan’s experiences regarding its ageing population.

Population Ageing and Generation Economy: Japan’s Experience

Among the developed countries, Japan has experienced with quickest ageing. During the 1950s, Japan had a huge young population. In the 1990s, only 12 per cent of the Japanese population was aged 65 years or older, which was about the same in the United States, far below the United Kingdom and other developed nations. However, the postwar ‘baby boom’ was followed by dramatically declining birth rates, while life expectancy grew. Therefore, the number of the ageing population has increased while the working or young population has decreased in the last couple of years. Consequently, in 2050, the Japanese population will have the largest percentage in the world. It is estimated that 40 per cent of its population will be over 65 years of age. However, in terms of the socio-economic condition of the ageing population, Japan government has a comprehensive social welfare scheme for the ageing population which enhances the ageing people’s healthy and pleasant life. In the past two decades, the number of the ageing population (people aged 65 years or older) in Japan has almost doubled, reaching 29 million or 23 per cent of the population in 2010. Regarding ageing people, Japan implemented public, mandatory Long-term Care Insurance (LTCI) in 2000. It is the most beneficial program in the world for the ageing population. Especially, the most popular service is adult day-care, with 1.9 million users benefiting from this care scheme (Tamiya et al., 2011). Japan’s government mostly

emphasised the service to older people over cash payments. Under the LTCI, currently 6.90 million Japanese are benefiting.²

Japan has a significant elderly population, with over 25% of its residents—specifically, 28.7%—age 65 or older. As of September 2020, this equates to around 36.17 million individuals, making Japan the nation with the largest percentage of seniors globally (European Parliament, 2020) and in 2025, the ageing population increased by 30 per cent 2025 (Table 2).

Table 1: Country with the highest Estimated Share of Ageing People (age 65 and older)

Countries/Territories	Year 2025
Japan	30
Italy	25.1
Portugal	24.9
Greece	24.4
Finland	24.2
Germany	23.7
Hong Kong	23.7

Source: Richter (2025).

In the same year, the ratio of seniors remained well above 25.1 per cent in Italy, the second most aged society, and 24.9 per cent in Portugal, which placed third in the world (Table 1; Table 2). However, the ageing population also makes a contribution to society in terms of the income generated. In Japan, 12.9 per cent of its labour force is contributed by the ageing population. The ageing people in Japan are mostly employed in the wholesale and retail industry, with 1.27 million elderly workers, followed by agriculture and forestry with 1.07 million (Japan Times, 2019).

Table 2: Trends in the Ageing Population of Japan (from 1960 to 2018)

Year	Percentage of ageing population (65 years old and above)
1960	5.7
1965	6.3
1970	7.1
1975	7.9
1980	9.1
1985	10.3
1990	12.1
1995	14.6
2000	17.4
2005	20.2
2010	23.0
2015	26.6

² Long-Term Care Insurance System. Mandator Heal, Labour and Welfare.
<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/12300000/000614772.pdf>

2016	27.3
2017	27.7
2018	28.1
2019	29
2020	29
2021	29
2022	29
2023	30
2024	30
2025	30

Source: Statistics Bureau (2019); The World Bank (2024); Statista (2025).

Japan enjoyed the demographic bonus throughout the years 1950-1990. However, after the 1990s, Japan has entered the demographic decline period (Table 2). In this regard, Japan's experience in the demographic change after 1990 could be negative in the working force supply and the national economy. As a result, Japan has faced a shortage of labour. According to the Persol Research and Consulting and Chuo University estimation, Japan will face a shortage of 6.44 million workers in 2030. In this regard, the government has already introduced a series of steps to make up for the labour shortage, such as accepting more foreign workers and promoting women's participation in the labour market (Japan Times, 2019).

Increasing the population will likely reduce the overall labour-force participation rate, thus reducing potential output growth. Whether or not this affects inflation depends crucially on how quickly aggregate demand and supply adjust. At the same time, ageing affects other factors of production, such as the rate of return to capital accumulation and land prices. Moreover, ageing is also involved in higher government expenditures on health care and pensions, adding to the already high fiscal consolidation needs in Japan. A significant and sustained fiscal strengthening will also have significant implications for the output gap and inflation dynamics. Along with this, the excess amount spent by the elderly during retirement could also put pressure on Japan's government treasury. Nevertheless, due to government initiatives, the ageing population in Japan is more effective compared to other developed countries and has a significant participation in the labour supply (Anderson et al., 2014). Hence, it is significant to mention that Japan is one of the best examples of countries facing the ageing problem.

A country's population structure and demographic factors significantly impact its economic growth and development. It is pertinent to mention the following:

“Population age structure influences an economy for a simple reason. The economic behaviour of individuals varies in systematic ways as they proceed through life. School attendance, childbearing, labour force participation and productivity, saving, and consumption all vary with age. Thus, the transition in population age structure influences the shares of the population that are in school, or working, or retired. Other things being equal, populations concentrated at ages with higher saving rates, greater wealth will have higher average saving rates or higher per capita wealth. (Mason & Lee, 2011, pp. 5-6).

Due to the better age structure, especially the large portion of working young people in the total population, the national economy of a country has been enhanced. This demographic bonus enhanced the quality of employment, which influenced the country's economy positively. On the contrary, the increasing number of elderly people or demographic burden has created pressure on government spending, particularly in the health care system and negatively influences the country's national economy. Ageing people led the smaller labour force, which is a negative factor for the national economy. In addition, ageing people have also shown a trend towards a lower saving rate, which leads to limited investment and negatively impacts the national economy. Moreover, due to the ageing population, dependency on working people is also a negative factor for economic growth and development. In this regard, the Japanese government has created a model welfare and sustainable elderly people management system, which positively influences society and contributes to the national economy in some cases. Therefore, regarding the ageing experience, Japan could be a good lesson for countries such as Bangladesh that are approaching the ageing problem or could face this issue in the future. Japan is leading the way in embracing active ageing, a transformation that not only strengthens its economy but also alleviates the financial pressure on the government. This proactive approach enhances the well-being of older citizens while benefiting society as a whole.

Ageing Population in Bangladesh: Lessons from Japan

Bangladesh has a population of 176.4 million, which makes it the eighth most populous country in the world (World meter, 2025). In Bangladesh, the population aged 60 years and older is growing faster than the overall population due to increased life expectancy. By 2050, if replacement fertility is achieved, one in ten people will be elderly, and in Bangladesh, one in five will be elderly. As a result, Bangladesh will face significant challenges in managing its large elderly population. As a developing country, the elderly population in Bangladesh faces challenges related to health services, family relationships, and social security. Changing family structures, poverty, social and cultural norms, and inadequate healthcare facilities have contributed to these challenges, resulting in significant social and economic burdens for the country (Kabir et al., 2013).

Table 3: Trends in Population Ageing in Bangladesh (2001-2015)

Projection Year	60+ Population (in Million)	% of Elderly Population
2001	7.9	6.1
2006	8.3	5.9
2011	9.8	6.5
2016	11.3	7.0
2021	14.0	8.2
2026	18.0	9.9
2031	22.1	11.6
2036	27.3	13.7
2041	31.9	15.5
2046	36.6	17.2
2051	44.1	20.2

Source: Kabir et al. (2013).

In 2001, only 7.9 million (6.1%) of the population in Bangladesh was elderly. However, this figure has been rising over the years, and by 2051, it is projected to reach 44.1 million or 20.2 per cent of the country's total population (Table 3). The government of Bangladesh currently lacks a comprehensive strategy to address the challenges associated with an ageing population. Although a monthly allowance system has been established, it benefits only a limited number of elderly individuals. Furthermore, the amount provided is inadequate to meet their basic needs. The government needs to formulate a holistic plan that encompasses all elderly citizens, ensuring they receive the necessary support and resources to uphold their dignity later in life. Conversely, the government does not have a comprehensive framework for its medical facilities, leading to elderly individuals receiving healthcare services comparable to those of the general population. While a few government-run elderly care homes in Bangladesh exist, these facilities are inadequate and poorly equipped to provide proper care. Furthermore, a significant proportion of elderly individuals in Bangladesh are unproductive, often lacking engagement in income-generating activities.

Given this context, the government of Bangladesh should adopt extensive strategies modelled after Japan's experience to effectively tackle the challenges posed by an ageing population. Rather than concentrating solely on cash incentives, the government should prioritise providing diverse services for the elderly, akin to those available in Japan. Furthermore, it is imperative for the government to establish free medical services tailored for senior citizens. With a comprehensive and inclusive approach to elderly care, the ageing population has the potential to make significant contributions to the national economy of Bangladesh, resembling the beneficial impact observed in Japan.

A significant challenge is whether Bangladesh can effectively adopt the Japanese model for enhancing active ageing. Japan is widely regarded as a global leader in the welfare of older adults. However, Bangladesh cannot simply emulate Japan's strategies for managing its ageing population and promoting active ageing. The two countries operate within distinctly different cultural contexts, social values, and practices. Furthermore, Bangladesh's financial resources are considerably less than those of Japan. Consequently, while Bangladesh may seek to draw lessons from the Japanese active ageing model, it is essential to make substantial adaptations aligned with its socio-economic and cultural realities.

Concluding Remarks

Japan's experience with the issue of an ageing population differs significantly from that of other Asian countries. As one of the world's leading economies, Japan has been addressing its ageing population effectively over the past few decades. However, this demographic shift has negatively impacted the country's national economic growth. Japan, as a developed nation with a strong manufacturing economy, is grappling with a critical labour shortage fueled by its shrinking younger population. To combat the challenges associated with an ageing demographic, Japan's innovative policies and welfare programs for marginalised elderly communities can provide valuable lessons for other countries, such as Bangladesh.

However, due to its demographic patterns, social structure, cultural factors, and limited financial resources, Bangladesh cannot entirely adopt Japan's model for supporting its ageing population. Nevertheless, several programs initiated by Japan for elderly welfare are among the best globally and can serve as valuable examples for both developed and developing countries.

In this context, the Bangladesh's government could consider implementing Japan's long-term care insurance program for the elderly. Additionally, recognizing the country's financial constraints, the government has launched an employment program for the elderly similar to Japan's approach. This initiative is expected to have a positive effect on the country's economy. Based on Japan's experience, the Bangladeshi government can consider the following recommendations:

First, the government should provide training for older individuals that aligns with their interests and skills to enhance their employability.

Second, the government can engage older people in income-generating activities, which will improve their physical fitness and social standing.

Third, ageing care centres should be established in both urban and rural areas of Bangladesh. In the ageing centres, there should be developed and promoted programs that encourage social interaction and community engagement to combat loneliness and isolation among older adults.

Fourth, the Bangladesh government should ensure access to affordable, high-quality healthcare services, including preventive care and mental health support.

Fourth, universal allowances should be provided for all seniors, particularly those aged 65 and above. In this regard, the government can adopt policies that provide financial assistance and security, such as pension plans, savings incentives, and assistance for low-income seniors in Bangladesh.

Fifth, the Bangladesh government can offer opportunities for lifelong learning and skill development to keep seniors mentally active and engaged in their communities.

Sixth, the government can adopt policies that advocate for the rights and needs of older adults, ensuring they have a voice in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Overall, tackling ageism, fostering age-friendly environments, and providing integrated and long-term care are essential actions needed to support the ageing population and successfully attain the SDGs in Bangladesh (Ageing: Global population, 2025).

These suggestions can enhance the overall quality of life for the elderly population and promote their well-being and dignity in Bangladesh. Finally, it is suggested that:

Taking into consideration economic and social dynamics associated with population ageing is important for achieving sustainable development goals by 2030, relating to reducing the risk of poverty, improving health and well-being in all age groups, achieving gender equality and ensuring full and productive employment and decent work for all. (Dobrokhleb & Barsukov, 2017, p. 101).

In conclusion, the ageing population is not a significant problem for Bangladesh; however, the government needs to develop a long-term policy to manage this demographic shift and enhance its contribution to the national economy. Additionally, the respectful living conditions afforded to the elderly in Japan can serve as an excellent example for policymakers in Bangladesh to consider.

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